

FROM A MILITARY ACADEMY TO A DEFENCE UNIVERSITY: THE NEEDED TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

This paper analyses the journey of the Military Academy of Malaysia (MAM) and what it had achieved that led to the upgrade to become a defence university, the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM). As a young establishment, much of its aspirations and achievements are yet to be determined and analysed. The first part of this paper narrates the inception of the MAM in Malaysian higher learning education context. Focus is given on the need to have a tertiary military institution that reflects the national defence strategy and foreign policy. The second part of this paper concentrates on the achievements of the MAM and NDUM. This part too examines the significance of the upgrade from the academy to a defence university. Some implications and adjustments are discussed at the end of this paper since the new status is awarded to the youngest public university in Malaysia.

Keywords: Military academy, military learning environment, defence university, P KDT

Introduction

Military institutions are considered to be the oldest organisation in the world. Since Plato, military organisations have often been called the ‘guardians’ and the public respects them as the guardians (Stiehm, 2002; Lord, 1989). Given their special role and prestige, most governments need to ensure that their military institutions are ready to defend the country. Such readiness depends critically on comprehensive education and training. Continuously improving the education and training programmes for the military has, therefore, become one of the most important agendas of governments. This is reflected in the large military budgets that have emerged in the post WW2 world. In Plato’s original conceptualisation, military

education and training demanded physical, intellectual, strategic, military, moral and practical programmes (Plato, 1998). Furthermore, depending on the national defence strategies and foreign policies of a country, the aims and also aspirations of the country will be reflected indirectly in the education and training programmes of its military institutions.

In Malaysia, the first joint tertiary military institution was the Military Academy of Malaysia (MAM). It was established in July 1995 and celebrated its 11th anniversary in 2006 by advancing to a new status, the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM). Looking at the development and achievements, the NDUM has a long way to go but the promises of bright future are here. This paper highlights the important aspects of the MAM/NDUM. The most critical section in this paper is the discussions on transformation from being an academy to a defence university at the end of this paper.

The MAM

The planning to establish a military academy in Malaysia was first discussed in the 1970s. This planning was based on two urgent needs. Firstly is to have a joint academy that can train professional and military personnel at the same time and secondly is to train trainees from three different services under one roof. This is vital in order to develop understanding and respect at the early stage of the students' recruitment. The trends then were to have graduates from civilian institutions and trained them for one year or one and a half year to become graduate officers. Or, military personnel were trained in single service colleges around Malaysia. The main problem with this arrangement was the difficulty in attracting graduates to join the armed forces. As a result, in 1993, serious planning was made to materialise the planning. On February 1995, the Memorandum between the Defence Minister and Education Minister was signed concerning the proposal to form an academy. On 8th March 1995, the cabinet approved the formation of the MAM and it was officially formed on 1st July 1995.

The MAM was located inside Sungai Besi Camp Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. This location remains the same even after the upgrade to the NDUM. Sungai Besi Camp is a premier camp and is one of the largest Army camps in Malaysia. The camp is also one of the centres for joint services. During its earlier establishment, the MAM used the buildings of the Royal Military College (RMC), the secondary military education in Malaysia, for classes and lectures. Staff and lecturers' rooms were also located at the RMC buildings. This is because the MAM's complex was under planning and construction. In 2002, the MAM complex was ready for use and all academic and military activities shifted to this new complex. The MAM

complex was also located inside Sungai Besi Camp. It is obvious as to why the location is as such. It is believed that strict military environment can help to nurture discipline and obedient military trainees (Lakoff, 2003; Carr, 1978).

Programmes carried out at the MAM were based on the co-operation between the Ministry of Defence, Malaysia that provided military training programmes and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) which provided tertiary education. With this agreement, 15 lecturers from UTM were seconded to the MAM to begin the academic programme. The first batch of undergraduate cadet officers, called P KDT, totalling 172 started their military training and tertiary education at the academy in 1995.

The vision of the MAM was to pioneer the fields of military training, education and research. Commitment to create military officers who are equipped with professional skills, academic knowledge and noble characters to serve and lead the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) for national defence was the main mission of the MAM. There were basically 10 objectives for the establishment of the MAM (Ministry of Defence Annual Report 1997) as summarised in the next two paragraphs.

The MAM aimed to create military leaders with high qualifications, creativity, efficiency, noble characters and strong religious foundations. In so doing, the education of P KDT covers military, engineering, defence science and management knowledge. As the front liners of a nation's defence, progressing together in one batch and commitment amongst the P KDT towards an integrated Armed Forces is a must. Further, the MAM inculcated the spirit of integration amongst military and non-military personnel in educating and training of the P KDT. The MAM strived too to achieve excellence in education, academic expertise and the superiority of research in order to contribute towards excellence in the science and technology of defence.

As the only tertiary military environment in Malaysia, the MAM was building a suitable learning environment for the students while practising military culture and ethics. It also inculcated a continuous learning culture through the addition of educational opportunities for in-service personnel. The MAM also provided facilities for professional training in the science and technology of defence, management and research, and provided resources of knowledge with high values in the fields of science, technology and defence studies through international networks.

As an upgrade from the MAM, the NDUM adopts all of the objectives of the academy. Nonetheless, greater emphasis is given on academic excellence and building the 'leaders of

characters.’ This means the graduates of the NDUM will be trained and moulded to become graduate officers, commissioned officers, sportsmen/women, masters of an unarmed combat, leaders in religious practices and officers and gentlemen/ladies (Zulkifli Zainal Abidin & Tengku Mohd Tengku Sembok, 2010). The concept of ‘leaders of characters’ puts forth an all rounder graduate of the university, who are able to face the challenges of the 21st century threats.

Looking at the objectives above, an analysis is needed to evaluate the contexts of the existence of the NDUM within the Malaysian Defence Strategy and Foreign Policy. Before further analysis, it is important to understand Vision 2020, the brainchild of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad. Through the nine challenges presented, not one single clue was given to the importance of the armed forces; however it is assumed that the 10th unwritten challenge is “the defence of nation and the security of the people” (Abdul Ghani Yunus, 1995). This is because without the political and economic stability, which has a direct relation to military capability, all the other nine challenges cannot be realised successfully and efficiently.

Close examination of the objectives of the NDUM reflects the vision. The first objective of the NDUM responds to the fourth challenge of the vision which is to establish “a fully moral and ethical society, whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values and imbued with the highest ethical standard” (Mahathir Mohammad, 1995). This also reflects the desire to produce ‘leaders of characters.’ The second, fifth, sixth, eighth, ninth and tenth objectives answer the sixth challenge of Vision 2020 which is to establish “a scientific and progressive society, a society that is innovative and forward looking, one that is not only a consumer of technology but also a contributor to the scientific and technological civilisations of the future” (Mahathir Mohammad, 1995). The third and fourth objectives respond to the first challenge of the vision which is to establish “a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny; a nation at peace with itself, territorially and ethnically integrated, living in harmony and full and fair partnership with loyalty and dedication to the nation” (Mahathir Mohammad, 1995). Lastly, the seventh objective of the MAM responds to the fifth challenge of the vision which is to establish a matured and tolerant society in which everybody is free to practise and profess his/her customs and traditions.

As Vision 2020 becomes the aim of the nation, the NDUM’s participation is inevitably critical. As a whole, the MAF needs to reform in order to serve the nation in 2020. This reformation is based also on the national defence strategies and foreign policies. Since the mid 1990s the Malaysian government has shifted its focus from the counter-insurgency strategies of the early decades of independence to wider questions of Malaysian security in the regional

and global context. These changes recognise the momentous shifts in the overall security architecture of the Asia Pacific region. After gaining Independence in 1957, the government started to develop relations with neighbouring countries. A series of talks ultimately led, in 1963, to the first Malaysian Prime Minister's proposal to establish Malaysia. This Malaysian state was to include Peninsular Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore and Brunei. However, consensus could not be reached. This then led to a period of confrontation in 1963. In the end, the modern Malaysia state was established with those who agreed to come together. However, Brunei and Singapore (two years later) withdrew and became separate political entities.

These early encounters made Malaysia aware of the importance of regional security. Malaysia's sensitivity to regional security was further heightened towards the end of the Vietnam War when Saigon collapsed and British and U.S. troops were withdrawn. Malaysia had a strong anti-communist history, based on the communist uprisings of 1940-1960. More recently, Malaysia has had to again reconsider the evolving regional security scenarios with the rise of India and China and the threat of international terrorism. Today, Malaysia is engaged in a continuous reassessment of the kind of military system it needs and the appropriate educational and training infrastructure that this requires.

Malaysia's National Defence Strategy identifies three key areas of interest. Firstly, there are national strategic interests that involve the immediate territory surrounding Malaysia, the region and the international arena. Secondly, the policy speaks of Malaysia's defence principles which include (a) preventing and obstructing threats to national security; and (b) total defence. Lastly, the strategy revolves around three main principles which are defined as (a) self reliance; (b) regional cooperation; and (c) foreign assistance. The principle of self reliance is further supported by two notions; having the capacity to act alone without any outside assistance in all matters pertaining to internal security; and having the capacity to act alone in defending its sovereignty and security interests within its immediate neighbourhood from various levels of external threats (National Defence Strategy, 2003).

Malaysia has repeatedly stressed the importance of adhering to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs of its neighbours. At the same time, good neighbourhood policy has led Malaysia to develop close bilateral relations with its border states. In the event of disputes about land and maritime boundaries Malaysia has involved the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The manner in which Malaysia resolved overlapping territorial claims with the Philippines (over Sipadan Island) and Singapore (over Batu Putih Island) provide examples of Malaysia's commitment to reconciliation. Perhaps the most significant example of

Malaysia's engagement with regional cooperation has been her involvement in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) which has proven to be a major confidence building initiative in Southeast Asia.

The defence university's objectives have to support the national defence strategy and foreign policy which stress the need for self reliance, regional co-operation, external assistance and constructive approach. The objectives are also consistent with the objectives of Vision 2020 for the armed forces. The students must not only be able to fulfil their duty as students but also more importantly to be able to function and achieve the vision after graduation and being commissioned. As such, proper and suitable education and training programmes are needed to ensure the 'future guardians' of Malaysia receive the best and in return, be the most dedicated and loyal defenders of the nation.

The MAM and NDUM – Components

Not many students are willing to join military academies relative to the whole population as recruits need to be not only mentally and "academically" strong, but also physically and emotionally tough (Holder & Murray, 1998) and willing to subject their personal egos to a demanding and powerful hierarchy. In many countries, the lure of a military career is very small because other sectors offer better salaries as well as greater opportunities for career development (Montroll, 2002; Abdul Ghani Yunus, 1995). The day of a P KDT, for example, starts as early as 5.30 a.m. and ends at 11.30 p.m. In between, P KDT are expected to attend academic and military sessions accordingly. In the afternoon, it is compulsory for military cadets to participate in sports activities or games. Evening hours will be spent for revisions or sometimes military activities. To have an overall overview of the MAM and NDUM, Table 1 summarises the main components of the academy and university.

Table 1: The MAM and NDUM – their academic and military training aspects

Aspects	The Military Academy of Malaysia (MAM)	The National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM)
Year of Establishment	1995	2006
Partner for Tertiary Education	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)	[award its own degrees]
Components	a) Academic Programme b) Military Programme	a) Academic Programme b) Military Programme
Academic Programme	a) Department of Engineering b) Department of Science c) Department of Management & Liberal Studies	a) Faculty of Engineering b) Faculty of Defence Science & Technology c) Faculty of Management & Strategic Studies d) Faculty of Medicine & Defence Health

Number of Degree Offered	12 (undergraduates)	11 (undergraduates) 10 (postgraduates)
Number of Students	2,385 cadets (2005)	2,271 cadets and civilians (2012)
Staff	52 (academic); 281 (administration & supporting staff) (2005)	224 (academic); 574 (administration & supporting staff) (2012)
Annual Budget	RM14.8 million (2004/2005)	RM65 million (2011/2012)

Based on these academic and military training aspects, it can be concluded that the MAM and later the NDUM mainly concentrates on the areas of science and technology with the most emphasis given to engineering. The Department of Engineering offered seven out of 12 degrees at the MAM. The same goes to the Faculty of Engineering that offers four undergraduate programmes and five postgraduate programmes. This is in lieu with the dire need of more engineers in the MAF (Abdul Ghani Yunus, 1995) to support the defence industry in Malaysia. Close examination of the table also highlights that UTM played a large role in the MAM as its academic partner. The degree of P KDT upon completion of four or five years of study came from UTM. The new status allows the NDUM to award its own degrees. Nonetheless, much of the academic practices is inherited from UTM. The same role is seen for the MAF that is in charge of the military aspect by commissioning P KDT ‘Captain’ (for the Malaysian Army and the Royal Malaysian Air Force) and ‘Full Lieutenant’ (for the Royal Malaysian Navy).

The MAM received between RM13 and 15 million for its academic and military related expenses. Most bulk of the budget went to the students’ development programmes and staff professional development for example fixed monthly salary, uniforms and the like for P KDT and conference attendance and professional training for academic as well as military and clerical staff. It is pertinent to mention that lecturers’ salary was borne by UTM as all of them were UTM staff. The NDUM, on the other hand, enjoys an independent financial support of RM60 to 65 million annually. As such, the allocation given is bigger especially to cover the emolument of the staff. Nonetheless, until today, about 30 percent of the spending goes to infrastructures of the new university.

The MAM and NDUM – Minority Issues

At both the MAM and NDUM, issues on minorities can be categorised into two – gender and race. Both institutions are not an exclusive male establishment. Since the inception of the MAM, it had received female trainees into its unique environment. However, until the upgrade to the NDUM, it cannot be denied that the number of female trainees is small – on a ratio basis, 1:25 with one female to 25 male students. This is because there is a quota system

governing female officers in the MAF, hence to all its training institutions. Due to limited availability for positions and postings in the three parent services, annual intake for female trainees will be around 10 to 15 percent from the overall intake. Currently, the number of female cadets is 116 (11 percent) out of 1,056 *total military cadets* (undergraduate programmes only) at the NDUM.

On the race issue, the MAM and NDUM try to ensure that equal opportunity is present for every race in Malaysia. Unlike other government funded institutions, quota system does not play a pivotal role in selecting cadets to join these elite institutions. Nonetheless, the number of *non-bumi* is still small annually. It is found that the *non-bumis* are not attracted to a career in uniforms. Due to tough training and regimented lifestyle of uniformed personnel, many *non-bumis* opt for another career. Though the government believes that in order to increase competitive spirit amongst the cadets and ensure positive attitudes and characters more *non-bumis* should be joining the MAM/NDUM, nothing has been done to address this issue. Table 2 below shows the number of *bumis* and *non-bumis* at the MAM/NDUM and as can be seen the number of other races is unpredictable each year.

Table 2: The number of P KDT MAM/NDUM by race – original strength (1995-2011)

Race/Year	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Other(s)	Total
1995	140	16	15	1	172
1996	182	3	8	2	195
1997	171	10	3	3	187
1998	70	1	5	2	78
1999	180	9	5	0	194
2000	246	6	4	2	258
2001	215	1	2	3	221
2002	169	7	2	2	180
2003	246	7	7	1	261
2004	361	11	13	1	386
2005	234	8	7	4	253
2006	198	7	4	3	212
2007	331	5	5	6	347
2008	212	6	7	6	231
2009	404	7	6	5	422
2010	452	10	8	7	477
2011	557	9	7	9	582
Total	4368	123	108	57	4656

The
NDUM's
intake

**Bumis* refer to Malays and Others (Sarawakians & Sabahans); *Non-Bumis* refer to Chinese & Indians

However, based on the table, it is prevalent that the military institution is favoured by the Malays. Or is it the other way around? Some scholars claim that during the early

establishment of the MAF, the Malays were given the exclusive rights. This is seen as an upward mobility system – a way to elevate the status of the Malay society as the Chinese and Indians were much better off economically at the time (Enloe, 1977). Also, as the Malays were the native of the country, special rights were given to them by the British government to help defend the country during the insurgency period. Today, as the education system matures, the government is looking at meritocracy as a way to credit students into entering the higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Furthermore, it is important to note also that religions are not a factor in the MAM/NDUM. P KDT come from various religious backgrounds and they are free to exercise their beliefs, traditions and customs.

The NDUM – After Six Years of Existence

In 2012, the NDUM will celebrate its six years of existence. Although the NDUM is the youngest public university in Malaysia, it has brought a lot of impacts on the Malaysian education landscape. The first batch of the NDUM's graduates was in 2010 and 148 students were awarded degrees in their respective fields. The most prominent achievement would have been the two postgraduate students who were conferred their Masters degrees during the inaugural convocation ceremony of the defence university. The second batch of students who graduated in 2011 totalled up to 407 in number. These young officers are now serving the MAF in various corps and units.

Much has changed today especially on the physical infrastructures and programmes at the NDUM. The MAM only had one academic building, the NDUM has two; the MAM only had three blocks of accommodation, the NDUM has five and most importantly is that the NDUM today offers a medical degree with the establishment of the Faculty of Medicine and Defence Health. The pioneer 47 medical students mark a history in the making for the defence university because this medical programme is unlike any other medical programmes offered at other public or private universities in Malaysia. The medical programme at the defence university focuses not only on the normal medical studies but also emphasises on aerospace medicine, battlefield medicine, underwater medicine and disaster medicine.

The NDUM – The Future Ahead

The truth is the NDUM as an elite institution has still a long way to go. To be a prestigious higher learning institution, the NDUM needs to refine its overall learning atmosphere and training exposure. To begin with, the administrators and academics at the NDUM must find ways to improve the quality of graduates. Issues like time management and inadequate facilities should be tackled at the management level. P KDT should be given the

training to manage their time wisely and accordingly. Further, it is the responsibility of an academic and training institution to provide the best suitable facilities for the use of its students. Some suggestions on the possible improvements are listed below. It is important though to look at these suggestions within the local education context of Malaysia generally and the NDUM specifically.

- a) The introduction of new approaches to teaching is inevitable. For example, the implementation of technology, that is, e-learning and simulations may increase students' participation in their learning processes and keep them engaged.
- b) Learning at the NDUM must be in context, that is, P KDT must see the relevance of what they study with the real work in the military or their parent services.
- c) Co-ordination between academic and military training should exist. This means that P KDT must be able to relate what they learn in academic classes with their military sessions.
- d) It is high time Research and Development (R&D) activities at the NDUM be strengthened. Securing grants, although very competitive, must be amongst the top priority. The atmosphere can help P KDT to participate in their studies more. At the same time, as the only tertiary military institution in Malaysia, the NDUM has a sound ground to pioneer the defence industry as prescribed in one of its objectives of establishment.
- e) P KDT must be taught to respect both academic and military training by ensuring balance attention is given to both aspects.
- f) P KDT must be taught to make use of all available facilities to the fullest. This means that P KDT should take advantage of everything provided to them.
- g) Basic facilities for knowledge acquisition must be upgraded to ensure that P KDT can best exploit the means.
- h) Time-tabling of P KDT activities must include not only academic related matters but also non-academic activities like cultures and arts.
- i) Clashes of academic and military training must be avoided. This means advanced planning at the beginning of a semester should take into account all related events for both academic and military events.

- j) P KDT's attitude of job prospects must change. They should not assume that guaranteed jobs after graduation and being commissioned can make them 'care less' of their studies.

The foundation of good education and training has already been laid down. The next step is to strengthen the academic and military management and to provide a stability of higher learning institution to P KDT. The main focus is to produce quality graduates who are not only excellent in academics but also in military aspect. To accomplish this is not the task of the military administration alone. The civilian administration and staff, especially the lecturers play a huge role. As such, it is pertinent to ensure civil-military relations at the NDUM are in the best possible terms. Adjustments like 'get-to-know' or retreat programmes, academic dialogues and forums should be conducted at least quarterly in a year.

Moreover, the NDUM has a big task to define between military as a career and military as an option. Military as a career offers vast opportunities for graduates to move upward, continue for further education and be promoted. With these come the job satisfaction that can lead to contentment and diligence. In short, military as a career leads to military professionalism and it is a true working professional for the graduates. In contrast to military as an option, graduates only see military as a mean to obtain pay check and may not see the benefits offered by the MAF. Military as an option also leads to the difficulty in retaining professional personnel in the MAF.

Conclusion

To conclude, as the status changes, the NDUM must keep its objectives intact and at the same time aims for higher quality graduates in the future. The change in status too requires the change in organisational as well as educational structure. Now more than ever, P KDT must use the opportunities at the NDUM to gain as much knowledge and experience as possible. Being a military officer nowadays does not only rely on physical strength but more so, on the critical and analytical mind that can only come from consistent academic training. That is why the suggestions mentioned earlier should be considered seriously by the Ministry of Defence, Malaysia and Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia. The plan is there but to work the plan needs support from all parties involved.

Most importantly, the NDUM contributes to the nation like no other institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. As the only tertiary military institution in Malaysia, its noble objectives and teaching and learning processes have contributed to the development of the nation's guardians. The experiences gained at the NDUM will provide a good start for the

guardians to face the new world locally, regionally and globally. In this respect, the nation should pay tribute to the strength of P KDT in facing their years at the defence university and to the entire establishment of the NDUM for whatever is provided.

The 11th year anniversary of the MAM (1995-2006) was celebrated in style. The decision of the government to upgrade the MAM to a defence university on 10 November 2006 marks the shift from being just another option for higher learning to one of the prestigious institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. This shift must be accompanied by hard work and non-stop improvement and development in academic and military training alike.

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